

Ground-seasoning rains have fallen over most of the Shortgrass Country. Given a break on the frost decline, the grass could grow enough to keep livestock bankers from getting the pre-winter feed bill fidgets. Hope is restored in many quarters.

My neighbor, Goat Whiskers the Younger, has been operating in a dew or a waterspout since the first of August. His country hasn't gone a week without being refreshed by rainfall. The rest of the neighborhood has passed the same period on the thunder and lightning from Young Whisker's private rain clouds. As grass was covering his salt toughs, whirlwinds were threatening to knock over our lambs and calves.

Receiving all the rain works good in every category except on your popularity rating. The more rain you get, the less friends you have. The longer the wet spell lasts, the more the situation resembles having title to a chair on the school board or the draft board. As you well know, the winner's circle in the ranching game is so rarely formed and so precariously maintained, that it's the loneliest spot in ranchdom. For every old boy who makes a score, there's always a carload lot who can't stay in their beds for fear they'll run up their pillow expense.

Whiskers, however, bore up under his stigma in admirable form. As much as he could, he stayed out of town. On the telephone, he tried to steer the conversation to politics or religion. When his calves were delivered, he kept the weight sheet hidden in the sweatband of his hat. The truckers told me they'd hauled off lighter steers from feedlots, but Young Whiskers didn't publish the results.

Men of the cloth say that the ways of the Lord are mysterious. In regards to the other ways of life, they are right, I think. But out in the ranchlands, the word "mysterious" is adequate. I spent 60 days trying to figure out why Young Whiskers was practically underwater. To this day, I haven't the slightest notion why the rain fell in one spot.

Is the Maker trying to say that He's going to cull out a bunch of hombres that ranch around here? Or, is He saying that folks who led a life of innocence until age three, like whiskers did, are going to get more rain than the ones who waited until the first grade to get in trouble?

As I said, I don't know what the message is. It looks like a rain ought to be able to cross a net wire fence if it can cross a mountain range. But once the Shortgrass weather pattern gets the stopping fever, a flagpole can turn back a 10-mile front. So I guess we'd better be thankful for what we got and not what we missed last month.